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ABSTRACT

This monograph explores the possibilities for developing a cooperative relationship between the community college and the church that would help both institutions more effectively fulfill their roles and functions. Two community college phenomena that must be considered are the emergence of the "new" student and the new emphasis on community services. Means by which national and regional church agencies and local churches can relate to community colleges are: (1) educating local congregations about the dynamics of the community college; (2) assisting in the formation of groups involving both church and college leaders; (3) developing a communications network for those interested in church/college relations; (4) supporting ecumenical campus programs; (5) sharing resources with the colleges; and (6) developing coalitions to implement special community projects. (RN)

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MINISTRY AND THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

By
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The Church's involvement in higher education parallels the history of education in this country. Her scholarly interest and her need for educated leaders led the Church to play an important role in the estalishment of colleges and universities in the early days of this nation's history. With each new radical breakthrough in higher education, the Church, sometimes reluctantly and usually belatedly, has reaffirmed its commitment to higher education. During the last three-quarters of a century with the rise and dominance of the land grant colleges and public universities, the Church not only has supported church-related institutions of higher education, but has expended vast energies in establishing ministries related to the public colleges and universities - campus ministries, Bible chairs, and schools of Religion.

During the past decade, a radical new shift has been taking place in higher education. During the "60's", while traditional college campuses of this nation were racked with "revolutionists" forcing them to be relevant to the times, the greatest transformation in higher education has taken place almost without notice. The community college has become a major force in higher education in the United States. While it is true that there have been community or junior colleges on the American scene since the turn of the century, they have been scarcely noticed.

While the great universities living in the shadow of urban ghettos were being forced to give attention to community needs, community colleges were being established in urban areas with the commitment to community service. While students on prestigious campuses protested elitist admission standards, community colleges pledged themselves to the "open door" policy. While university faculty were rewarded for their research and publication, community colleges were priding themselves on the fact that classroom teaching was their measure; and while others were experimenting with pass-fail grades in selected courses, the community colleges were struggling to find a way to do away with the concept of "failure" for the whole learning process.

In the midst of social turmoil, the community college has been one of higher education's important responses to social change. As our society itself becomes more technological and more egalitarian, the pressures for the democratization of higher education have increased proportionately. A meaningful life in this age seems to be predicated on some form of education beyond high school.

What was once an isolated phenomenon today has become the most vigorous

force in higher education. In fact, the community college seems to have become everybody's answer.

> "The community college, then, has something for everyone. It offers the university a safety valve, the employer a trained worker, the graduate degree holder a job. It offers a place for the taxpayer's children, the second third infinite chances to people who, for whatever reason, want to go back to school. For the community at large, it promises academic and cultural upgrading. Even the police like it because young people, off the streets and under institutional custody are less likely to get into trouble. Small wonder the community college has become everybody's darling."[1]

Out of oblivion into this spectacular role is a pretty heady business so the critics rightly warn us that the very comprehensiveness of the community college makes it more vulnerable to social and political pressures than Clark Kerr's multiversity. The Newman Report calls the community college "everybody's answer" and sees the promises of the community college of being "rapidly undermined because the public, and especially the four year colleges and universities, are shifting more and more responsibilities onto the community college for undertaking the toughest task in higher education."[2]

Cohen and Brawer warn that "one should be wary of the tendency to look at a single institution as both the way of coping with frustration and a repository of hope. Enthusiasm can be a mask concealing the intention to unload the undesirable." [3]

As the community college struggles to establish its identity, two things seem to be coming to the fore and these are two things that are quite critical in helping the Church to understand its relationship to the community college. I call these the phenomena of the 70's. These might define more clearly the unique role of the community college. Certainly they are very significant to anyone who is concerned about the future of the community college.

The first of these is the "NEW STUDENT". Dr. Andrew Goodrich, director of Minority Group Programs for the American Association of Junior Colleges, suggests this term to replace such terms as "Educationally Disadvantaged", "Culturally Deprived", and the other handles we have given to those who don't fit by the traditional tests and measures. Dr. Patricia Cross in her book Beyond the Open Door gives an in depth analysis of the "New Student". [4]

When the question is asked, "Who should go to college?", our society has over its history evolved three different answers.

First there is the aristocratic answer. This was the basic approach in the early days of our nation. Money and social status was the measure. "Basic to the aristocratic philosophy of college admissions was the premise that the young people who should go to college were those who could afford it and who needed it for their station in life." [5]

The second was the meritocracy philosophy leading to the development of the land grant colleges and universities. The working man should be able to send his children to college and young people should be able to pursue professional careers. Education needed to be broader than that offered by the aristocratic colleges of the time. The meritocracy philosophy said that college admissions should be based on scholastic ability and willingness to study hard. While under the aristocratic system, those of the proper station of life were admitted to college whether they had the academic ability or not; under the meritocracy system "the most promising young people" were selected on the basis of a narrow criteria of grades and tests. Dr. Cross says, "Much as the aristocratic colleges had assumed that their curriculum was static and designed for an elite portion of the population, so the colleges of the meritocracy assumed that only a fairly small portion of the nation's population had the ability to benefit from what they had to offer."[6] These figures range from a low of 25% to an upwards of 52% or better and even the most optimistic figures seem to be made obselete by college enrollments.

Up until the advent of 1970, the meritocracy philosophy prevailed and still prevails pretty much today. But once again pressures to democratize higher education had begun to be felt and the egalitarian philosophy is being developed. "New Students are repeating history by entering the system, not so much by breaking down the barriers erected by the meritocracy (although there is some of that) as by flocking to a new kind of college dedicated to serving a different clientele."[7]

The egalitarian philosophy maintains that anyone who wants to further his education should be helped to do it regardless of his social status, economic resources, or past academic achievements.

To date, higher education has concentrated its efforts on the "New Student" by trying to make the "New Student" into the image of the traditional student. Thus we have remedial courses, motivational incentives, counseling, etc. This is an attempt to mold them to fit the meritocratic system whereas the egalitarian philosophy says the educational system will have to be designed to fit the learning needs of the "New Student".

We have probably reached the limits of the meritocratic system. Any young person today who has the traditional ability can for the most part get into college. The "New Students" are those who have scored in the lowest third of the academic standards and are written out by the meritocratic system.

> "Most of the New Students are Caucasians whose fathers work at blue-collar jobs. A substantial number, however, are members of minority ethnic groups. Most parents have never attended college, and the expectation of college is new to the family. The New Students themselves have not been especially successful at their high school studies."
>
> "Fundamentally, these New Students to higher education are swept into college by the rising educational aspirations of the citizenry. For the majority, the motivation for college does not arise from

> anticipation of interest in learning the things they will be learning in college but from the recognition that education is the way to a better job and a better life than that of their parents." 8

While the "New Student" includes many from the ethnic minorities, those of the lower socio-economic status, the blue-collar children, the "New Student" to higher education will be primarily those whose past academic performance for a variety of reasons has been below average. Their academic life will be one that has been caught in the syndrome of failure with all its devastating effects.

The "New Student" will be coming into higher education in increasing numbers. While the traditional college programs are not prepared to handle the learning needs of these "New Students" to higher education, the community college may be the only phase of higher education in America with enough built-in flexibility to expand the horizons of who is educable in our society. This is its challenge for the 70's.

Certainly the Church with its concern for "self-development of people" should find it very easy to empathize with the community college as it begins to face this challenge. And the college should be able to count on the Church as one of its prime advocates. The question as J. Springer puts it, "Will the Church seek ways to become an advocate with others for the rights of the high risk young and the unique task which the community college can offer? Will the Church risk a critical role in chastizing those colleges which offer much in their talk but nothing in terms of resources when it comes to the high risk student?" 9

The second phenomena of the 70's which may define the unique role of the community college is the new emphasis and the new definition of "Community Services." Four years ago with the establishment of the Council for Community Services, the process was established to challenge the rhetoric of the community college. Community Services has been written into the description of the comprehensive community college for a long time. However, this service has been looked upon either as a part of the public relations arm of the college or as the program of continuing education. It has offered lectures, concerts, recreation and art programs, and extension courses and the use of the facilities to community groups. These have been saleable efforts, neutral and unthreatening. If, however, you sit in on a session of the Community Services Council, you hear an entirely different language. Community Service, as a major function of the community college, is to be a catalytic force not a passive one. It is to supply leadership and to stimulate action programs. Edmund Glaser says, "The walls between the college and community are long overdue in their falling down." The open door is becoming a double door.

According to the Council for Community Service, Community Services should become the cutting edge by which the college penetrates into the life of the community and through which the total program of the community college becomes increasingly more relevant to community needs. Community Services rather than being passive and neutral is that program of the college which has the responsibility to reach out beyond the campus to play a vital role in helping the people and the institutions realize their potential and to help them solve

their problems. Such a stance is threatening and fraught with conflict so only a minority of the community colleges see sommunity services in that light, but this is a concern of the Community Council and the Community Council has a missionary zeal and this may well be the unique role for the bolder community colleges of the future.

The Reverend Mary Alice Geier, who has had more experience in the campus ministry as it relates to community colleges than anyone I know of, has for years been saying that the primary relation of the Church to the community college should be through the office of community services rather than through the student activities office as is the usual response of most Churches and most campus ministers, and of course is the expectation of most community college administrators. The student activities office approach at best suggests a paternalistic approach on the part of the Church; that is, the Church wants to do something for the students. At worst, it is an attempt to use the college for narrow, parochial interest. Community services office may be a more hopeful contact than the student activities office now. Community services does provide an avenue whereby some programs could be initiated in cooperation with the college especially if they are cooperatively sponsored.

Why should the Church interact with the community services of the community college? Primarily because it is the growing edge toward improving the total educational experience for learners and teachers and because the resources of the two institutions (Church and college) must be deployed to solve the confusion and conflicts of our community.

Robert Mayo, Director of the Church and Community College project for the Northern California United Ministries in Higher Education in an article in the Catalyst magazine says, "Our citizenry is plagued by an overwhelming sense of powerlessness. Cynicism rages among a once activistic student population. It is an age of reaction brought on by the failure of our nobler visions to achieve a social reality. One can neither preach nor teach profitably in such a setting unless the substance of the preaching and teaching addresses itself to man's struggle for the realization of his humanity in community. An educational process that emphasizes citizen participation in community development is education of the highest order. The affirmation and participation in community development is at the very heart of the Judo-Christian tradition. We perceive in this new relationship between community college and the Church an opportunity for the fullest realization of both institutions of their roles and functions in modern society." 10

For the most part one is forced to say that the Church has ignored the community college because it has not known what it is nor has it accepted it as a serious phenomena within higher education. This situation, however, is changing fast. If for no other reason, the sheer size of the community college is forcing people to notice it. The Carnegie Foundation Report envisions adding by 1980 230 to 280 new community colleges to the over 1,000 that already exist, enrolling 35 to 40% of all undergraduate students. But I hope that the Church is changing for more basic reasons than just the size of the institution. The Church is beginning to recognize the community college as a vital part of the higher education scene in America and is open to exploring what its relationship should be. More and more local congregations are seeking directions

from their Church bodies on how it should relate to the community college.

Basic to the Hebrew-Christian tradition is the belief in God's creative and redemptive activity in human history. For the Christian tradition, Christ is a unique embodiment of God's creative and redemptive activity. The mission of the Church then is one of service or ministry to the world and it would seem to me that one of the basic ways the Church can affirm this mission is by working with and supporting other community institutions dedicated to human service.

> "Many times the Church's contribution to the [community college] is not empirically different from what non-Christian groups are or can be doing: healing, visiting, befriending, looking after the hurt, providing a cup of water, sharing, listening to the lonely and forsaken. What, perhaps, makes the difference with our participation is the framework from which it is done -- though even with that explanation caution is urged. The [college] is not really a place for more "do-gooders", or for those who say, "Lord, Lord," but does welcome those with a passion for life and learning and growing." 11

I see the community college and the local Church as basic community institutions and the potential points of intersection of the Church and the community college in serving human needs is very significant.

While the form of this relationship and how it will be developed will vary with different communities, I would like to suggest a few ways the Church, with integrity, can relate to the community college.

First, I think one of the basic roles for the Church to play in relating to the community college is one that I would call the Advocate-Critic role. I think it is fundamental if the Church is serious. If we take seriously the Newman Report on Higher Education and the question of the identity of the community college and the political pressures that are being forced upon it, I think the integrity of the institution itself should be a basic concern of the Church. Its first concern, then, must be to maintain the integrity of the institution that is so important in higher education. This, of course, implies many things. It implies, on the part of the Church, that it will try to understand the goals and the aims of the community college. There has to be serious attempts in dialogue between the Church and the community college to understand what their common interests are. There must also be a willingness on the part of the Church to support and interpret even when things get tough. There must be a willingness on the part of the Church to criticize when it feels that the aims of the college are confused or when they are operating at less than their highest potential. This advocacy may be in local communities, it may be in the State, or it may be at the national level, but it must be one that helps us support the college against the social, political, and religious pressures that can come to bear upon it. 12

For the National and Regional Church agencies that are interested in the community college, there are at least three specific things to which they should be directing their energies:

1. Supporting and equipping local congregations to better understand the dynamics of the community college. National and Regional agencies must take the initiative in this.

2. Rather than securing campus ministry specialists for work in the community college, these agencies should find ways to recognize and assist those faculty, clergy, and lay persons who are the creative humanizers in their own local community. Where they do provide staff, they should be seen as resource brokers for ministry.

3. To make possible occasions where Church and community college leaders can explore together in small regional groups concerns that are common to both. There needs to be occasions for those who share a passion for life and learning to get together for growth and mutual support. Agencies for ministries in higher education can take the initiative in this.

4. The National and Regional agencies can develop a communications network of those interested in the relationship of Church and community college. Keeping abreast of the experiments in religious studies, innovations in education reforms, programs for Ethnic groups, community services projects, etc. are critical if a ministry is to be vital.

The local Churches certainly have limitless ways by which they can direct their energies in relationship to the community college.

1. First, the local Church leaders can manifest their interest by supporting ecumenical programs that already exist on campuses or by encouraging their development and by showing a willingness to resource them. Not just religious programs but student activities and other programs that help make real the concept that education is a total process, not just a classroom exercise. I think these are very vital to campus. The Church should be supportive of these rather than trying to impose some additional programs on them.

2. Along this same line, the Church can make its resources available for the enrichment in the life of the college. This would include encouraging and being willing to support by both time and energy the teaching of religion and religious courses and other courses that deal with meaning and value. Not only should the Church clergy and other leaders where possible be willing to assist in the teaching of these courses but certainly the Church needs to be the agency that supports the right of the community college to develop these kinds of curriculum as part of their basic programs.

   Michael Novak says that the young do not have conversations with adults on a human, ordinary basis, no models to challenge, to quarrel with, or to love. There is a moral and spiritual vacuum at the heart of the community.[13] Church leaders can be present on the campus and they can also be of assistance in the whole counseling program of the college. This implies certainly getting deeply involved in and developing an understanding of the college itself and the development of confidence

on the part of the Church of the counseling resources of the community and developing a trust relationship on the part of the Church to the community college. Also, the Church can make its physical facilities available to the community college, for teaching and for other programs related to the institution.

3. In light of all we have said about community services being one of the great new phenomena of the 70's, one of the most important things that the local Church and community college can do in relationship to the community college is to develop creative coalitions to carry out special community projects to meet community needs. The Church ought to be ready to join forces with the community college and other community groups who are concerned about the quality of life in our communities and not bother about who gets the credit or what kind of labels they carry.

4. Where the Church does have staff related to a local community college, be he a campus minister, chaplain, full-time or part-time, the basic task of this staff is to assist those in the academic community and those in the local congregation to fulfill their own task and mission. If you will, they are there to be resource brokers to assist the Church and the college to better fulfill its mission.

5. The community college itself can be a great resource to the local congregation. Any Church that functions as though the community college didn't exist is probably missing a great bet. The college can be a great resource to the Church in helping to sensitize the Church to the basic needs and issues of the community. It can also be a resource to the Church in helping the Church to understand its own educational task much better and it can help the Church with its own leadership development.

These are but a few examples, any one of which we could elaborate on at some length. And I am sure that there are many others that could be added to this list but this is simply to specify some ways that the relationship might develop.

Even though the community college is quite foreign to the Church's understanding, given the Church's historic commitment to higher education and its priorities for mission in this age of unrest, a relationship can be developed between the community college and the Church which will help both institutions to better fulfill their roles and functions in this society.

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Footnotes

[1]Edited by the editors of Change Magazine, Inside Academe, Arthur M. Cohen and Florence B. Brawer, "The Community College in Search of Identity" (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Change Magazine, 1972), pp. 164-65.

[2]U.S., Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Report on Higher Education (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1971), p. 57.

[3]Cohen and Brawer, "The Community College in Search of Identity", p. 165.

[4]K. Patricia Cross, Beyond the Open Door, (San Francisco, Cal.: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1971).

[5]Ibid., p. 2.

[6]Ibid., p. 3.

[7]Ibid., p. 4.

[8]Ibid., p. 15.

[9]J. Lynn Springer, "The High-Risk Student, the Community College and the Church as Advocate" (paper for the Pennsylvania Baptist Foundation for Campus Ministry, Oakmont, Pa., 1972), p. 58.

[10]Robert Mayo, "Community Development and the Church," Catalyst Magazine, Spring, 1972, p. 10.

[11]Robert L. Shaner, "Urban/Commuter Campus Ministry" (Study made at the University of Illinois for the Lutheran Council in the United States of America, 1972), p. 146 (adapted).

[12]The Southern California Task Force on Church and Community College has developed a process for keeping abreast of contemporary issues.

[13]Michael Novak, "Students and the University: The Vacuum," The Christian Century Magazine, April 8, 1970, p. 413.

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